

Provo Valley Half Marathon, Utah, US

This was a run planned for last year, but we couldn't get out there due to Covid ... so it all got planned again for this year. Bib pick up was the day before the run, and there were all the usual stands selling miracle supplements and the like ... but as this was the US, the additional miracle supplements being given away were free boxes of 'donuts' – one box per runner. For every ounce of donut eaten less than 12 hours before the race, it would knock 10 seconds off my time apparently. I was only marginally more sceptical than the claims of the other alchemists in the room ...

Anyway, it was a six o'clock start to avoid the heat of the Utah's semi-desert climate ... and to get to the start line, we had to be on buses by 4.30am at the latest ... so that meant being up by 3.20 am.

It felt a little strange running a half on a Saturday, as I normally do them on Sundays, but they do it on a Saturday due to the state's predominantly Mormon beliefs.

We arrived at the allotted parking area (a mall) around 4am and got on one of the awaiting yellow iconic American school buses, and received a bus safety briefing akin to going on a flight.



Once at the start, the organisers provided everyone with a foil blanket, and they had lit around 100 wood fires in (empty) half-oil drums to keep us warm ... after all it was a relatively chilly 15C degrees! There were also lots of very clean “Honey Buckets” (toilets), so little queuing required before returning to the firesides ...

The run takes place on roads and so one half of the dual carriageway had been closed off for us. The first 11km was down the Provo Valley canyon and the last 10k was along the main road into Provo.

The run starts at 5,400 ft and ends at 4,535 ft, so it is generally a downhill course (the marathon started further up the canyon at 6,200 ft and finished at the same spot, so was also nearly all downhill ... perhaps worth noting as it is a Boston Marathon qualifying run!).

At about 5.45am, we were told that there had been an accident on the route which hadn't quite been cleared, so the start was delayed ... we started at 6.19am. This was actually a little better for us non-locals as there was a little more light by then and we could enjoy the very picturesque canyon with its river, trees, rocks and waterfalls.

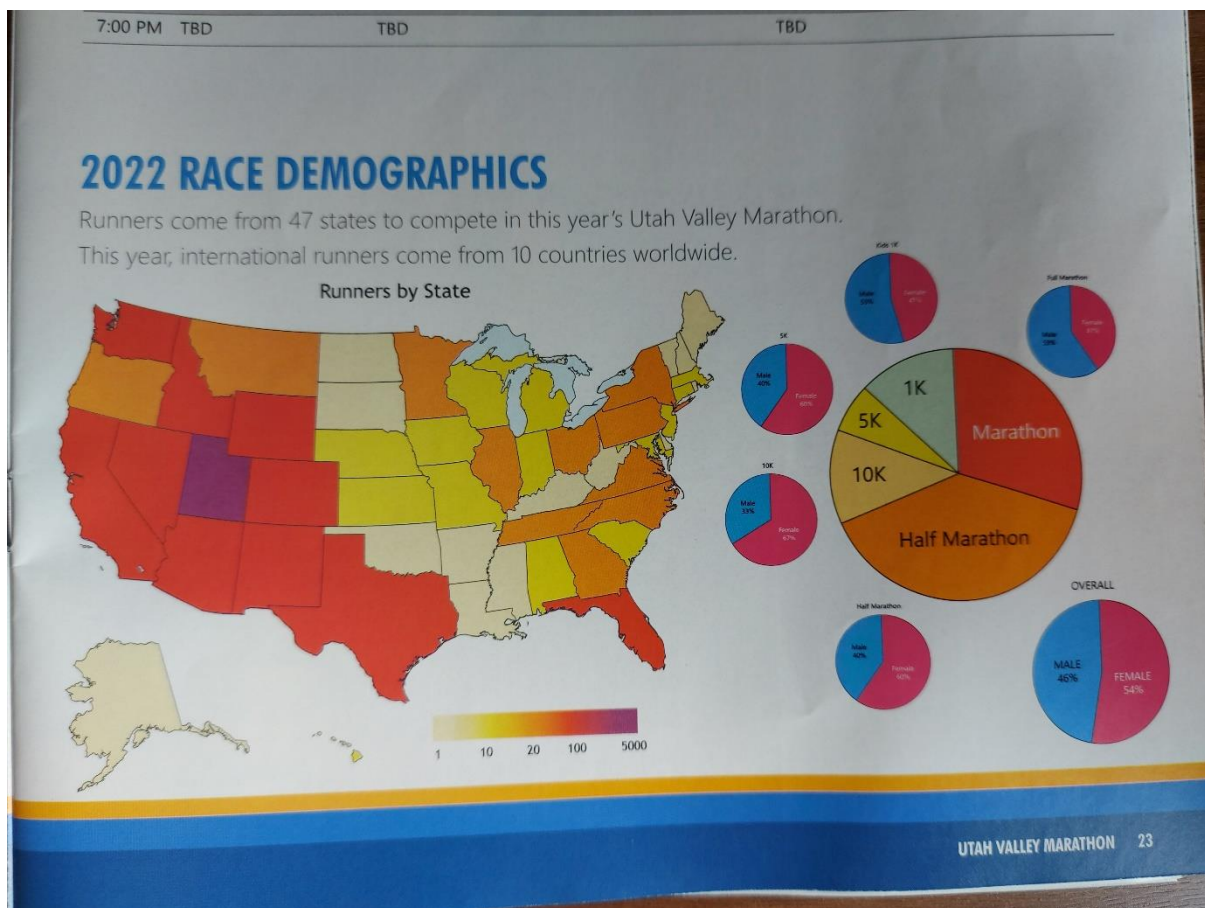
So off we went ...

My preparation had been a 3-mile jog in the two weeks prior to the event, but lots of hiking at 5000 – 600 feet. Alex's preparation had been lots of running at sea level and an 800-mile drive from San Francisco Airport getting him to the event at 8pm the night before (and so not so many hours before we needed to be up). It would be interesting to see whose approach would fare best ...

It was very well marshalled – with more police marshalling it than volunteers, and there were drinks (water and energy) and food (fruit) stations every 2 miles.

We were also a little surprised by the offer of rather nice metallic plaques mounted on real wood for any runner who completed the run in a negative split. We never did work out the reason for this ... perhaps to encourage people to pace themselves? There were also water machines you could run through that sprayed a drizzle of water on you, and at the end, there was a nice shirt and medal, drinks, snacks ... and free fried chicken sandwiches.

Post-race, we also studied the race demographic information in the Programme we each received. It might not show up very well below, but we were surprised by some of the data.



Overall the race distances, the total of women runners (54%) was higher than men (46%), and the only two races where there were more males than females were the kids 1k and the full marathon. The 5k and HM each comprised 60% women, and the 10k comprised 67% women. I wonder how this compares to UK demographics?

And the result? And who's approach worked best? I had a dreadful run ... just didn't happen ... my slowest HM for a few months at 2.06. But probably all down to not putting the running hours in. The other one of us got a(nother) PB ...



But returning to the demographics for a moment, there was one more personal interesting stat ...



One of us was one of us was 51st overall and 1st *International Finisher* (very well run PB – and a plaque for a negative split) and the other was 654th and 2nd *International Finisher* (out of 1542 finishers) ... cracking International stats, and great work from UK entrants! (but still a bit of a disappointing run!)

Paul Ackerley